

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A decorative hanging fabric panel for covering an architectural opening, said panel formed of intersecting base yarns, said panel comprising:

a plurality of intersecting base yarns defining a body region having edges and an interior;

a supportive header disposed along one edge of said body region, said supportive header comprising a plurality of stiffener yarns intersecting with some of said base yarns, said stiffener yarns comprising in combination low melt temperature filaments and common polymer filaments, said low melt temperature filaments having a melting point below the melting point of said common polymer filaments and said base yarns;

whereby said low melt temperature filaments bond with said common polymer filaments and with said intersecting base yarns upon melting and re-hardening such that said supportive header is more rigid than said body region.

2. The panel of claim 1, wherein the melting point of said low melt temperature filaments is below a specified heat treatment temperature and the melting point of said base yarn component is above said specified heat treatment temperature.

3. The panel of claim 2, wherein said specified heat treatment temperature is the temperature at which said panel is tented during the manufacturing process.

4. The panel of claim 2, wherein said specified heat treatment temperature is approximately 180 degrees C.

5. The panel of claim 1, wherein the melting point of said low temperature polymer filaments is approximately 150 degrees C or less and the melting point of said common polymer filaments is approximately 250 degrees C or more.

6. The panel of claim 5, wherein the melting point of said base yarns is approximately 250 degrees C or more.

7. The panel of claim 1, wherein said stiffener yarns are more rigid after melting and re-hardening of said low melt temperature filaments.

8. The panel of claim 1, wherein said supportive header is a single layer.

9. The panel of claim 1, wherein the handling characteristics of said base yarns and said stiffener yarns prior to being melted and re-hardened are similar.

10. The panel of claim 1, further comprising stiffener yarns disposed along the edge of said body region opposite to said supportive header to define a bottom edge, wherein said bottom edge is more rigid than said body region upon melting and re-hardening of said stiffener yarns.

11. The panel of claim 1, further comprising stiffener yarns disposed within said interior of said body region.

12. The panel of claim 1, wherein some of said base yarns are alternated in parallel with said stiffener yarns.

13. A decorative hanging fabric panel for covering an architectural opening, said panel comprising in combination intersecting base yarns and stiffener yarns and having at least one stiffened area defined by the location of said stiffener yarns, such that the rigidity of said stiffened area is greater than that of the remainder of the panel in which no stiffener yarns are located;

said base yarns having a melting point;

said stiffener yarns comprising in combination low melt temperature polymer filaments having a melting point and common polymer filaments having a melting point, wherein said melting point of said low melt temperature polymer filaments is less than said melting points of said base yarns and said common polymer filaments;

whereby said low melt temperature filaments are bonded with said common polymer filaments and said base yarns within said stiffened area upon melting of said low melt temperature filaments at a temperature below said melting points of said base yarns and said common polymer filaments and subsequent re-hardening.

14. The panel of claim 13, wherein said melting point of said low temperature polymer filaments is below approximately 180 degrees C and said melting points of said base yarns and said common polymer filaments are above approximately 180 degrees C.

15. The panel of claim 14, wherein said melting point of said low temperature polymer filaments is approximately 150 degrees C or less and said melting point of said common polymer filaments is approximately 250 degrees C or more.

16. The panel of claim 15, wherein said melting point of said base yarns is approximately 250 degrees C or more.

17. The panel of claim 13, wherein said stiffened area defines a supportive header.

18. The panel of claim 13, wherein the handling characteristics of said base yarns and said stiffener yarns prior to being melted and re-hardened are similar.

19. The panel of claim 13, wherein said stiffened area is along an edge of said panel.

20. The panel of claim 13, wherein said stiffened area is within the interior of said panel.

21. The panel of claim 13, wherein some of said base yarns are alternated in parallel with said stiffener yarns.

22. The panel of claim 13 comprising a pair of stiffened areas adjacent each other, wherein said stiffened areas are joined together to define a rib.

23. A method of manufacturing a decorative hanging fabric panel for covering an architectural opening, said panel having at least one stiffened area, comprising the steps of:

providing base yarns and stiffener yarns, said stiffener yarns comprising in combination low melt temperature polymer filaments and common polymer filaments, wherein the melting point of said low melt temperature polymer filaments is less than the melting points of said base yarns and said common polymer filaments;

producing a fabric panel by intersecting said stiffener yarns with said base yarns;

heating said fabric panel to a temperature greater than the melting point of said low melt temperature polymer filaments but less than the melting points of said base yarns and said common polymer filaments, such that said low melt temperature polymer filaments flow into greater contact with said common polymer filaments and with any base yarns adjacent to or intersecting said stiffener yarns;

reducing the temperature of said fabric panel to a temperature less than the melting point of said low melt temperature polymer filaments such that said low melt temperature polymer filaments re-harden and bond with said common polymer filaments and with any base yarns adjacent to or intersecting said stiffener yarns to define a stiffened area having greater rigidity than areas of said fabric panel not containing said stiffener yarns.

24. The method of claim 23, wherein said step of heating said fabric panel comprises tentering said fabric panel.

25. The method of claim 23, wherein said step of intersecting said base yarns and said stiffener yarns is performed by weaving.

26. The method of claim 23, wherein said step of intersecting said base yarns and said stiffener yarns is performed by knitting.

27. The method of claim 23, wherein said fabric panel is heated to greater than approximately 150 degrees C and less than approximately 250 degrees C.

28. The method of claim 24, wherein said fabric panel is heated to greater than approximately 150 degrees C and less than approximately 250 degrees C.

29. The method of claim 24, wherein said fabric panel is heated to approximately 180 degrees C.

30. The method of claim 23, wherein said stiffener yarns are positioned adjacent an edge of said fabric panel to define a single layer supportive header.

31. The method of claim 23, wherein said stiffener yarns are positioned within the interior of said fabric panel.

32. The method of claim 31, wherein multiple stiffened areas are produced and wherein adjacent stiffened areas are joined together to define ribs.

33. The method of claim 23, wherein said stiffener yarns are alternated in parallel with said base yarns.

34. The method of claim 23, further comprising the step of inserting grommets into said stiffened area.

35. The method of claim 32, further comprising the step of inserting grommets into said stiffened area.